

/For data on Forest Panchayats and their finances,
see 26: Rao, AW1 India, Tables 21-24, pp. 214-218,
category 116.

121 system of the central area of South Malabar and
101 Cochin, with brief references to social structure
and Nayar kinship in North Malabar. No account
is given of Travancore, since no fieldwork was
done in that area.

631 III The Traditional Political System in the Cen- 544 tral Kingdoms

(1) Caste and Territorial Divisions

Throughout Kerala, the highest Hindu caste
was the Nambudiri Brahmans, ritual and schol-
astic leaders of the people, who today form one
hundredth of the total population. Carriers of
the Sanskrit language and of ancient Vedic cul-
ture, they are thought to have entered Malabar
by peaceful infiltration from the eastern plateau
[11] early in the Christian era and to have estab-
lished themselves, by reason of their literacy
and supposedly superior ritual knowledge, as
religious leaders over the already established
565 population. In the traditional period, they were
631 throughout Kerala important landowners and
priests, in charge of most of the temples and
public rituals. They ranked ritually above the
kings and were above and outside the political
systems of the several kingdoms. Alone of all
the castes, they moved freely unmolested be-
tween enemy kingdoms, married across the boun-
daries, held periodic ceremonies and feasts
attended by their caste-members from all parts
of Kerala, and carried on their separate system
565 of intra-caste administration independently of the
631 administration of justice within the kingdoms.
623 For the latter purpose they divided out Kerala

565 into 64 gramams (caste areas), within each of
 631 which a Nambudiri assembly composed of the
 623 oldest members of the patrilineal extended fam-
 ilies of the area met periodically to arrange pub-
 lic ceremonies and tried cases of offence against
 caste laws. Within each gramam, the Nambu-
 [564] diris were divided into ranked subcastes accord-
 ing to their wealth and ritual functions; these,
 565 however, need not concern us here. Over the
 631 whole area, a dignitary known as the Aravan-
 693 cheri Tamburakkal, [12] who resided in Travan-
 core, was universally acknowledged as the rit-
 ual and administrative leader of the Nambudiris.
 This high priest was accorded the right to crown
 the kings of both Calicut and Cochin, though
 these rulers were traditionally at enmity. His
 jurisdiction in matters of the religious law gov-
 erning social relations between castes, was
 acknowledged through^{out} the area. The field of
 social relations of the Nambudiris was thus the
 whole of Kerala.

565 The ritual prestige of Nambudiris was sup-
 596 ported by their wealth: each patrilineal extended
 family owned the land in at least one village, and
 in addition local groups of family heads managed
 lands owned by important Brahman temples in
 each kingdom. The Nambudiris had a patrilineal
 [611] descent system of a peculiar type described be-
 low.

565 Below the Nambudiris in ritual rank came the
 613 royal matrilineal lineages of Calicut, Walluva-
 631 nad and Cochin. Though undoubtedly Nayar in
 origin and general culture, each of these lineages
 considered itself superior in ritual rank to its

- 692 shrine and temporary ostracism were the chief
 681 punishments, but at least among Iravas, grave
 offenders were sometimes excommunicated with
 the consent of the janmi and sold in slavery to
 623 Arab traders. The smaller castes of village
 servants each had their own assemblies extend-
 ing over a group of adjacent villages, who met
 582 chiefly at marriages and funerals. In all of these
 castes, the local group of the assembly, while
 not strictly endogamous, was the group within
 which the majority of marriages took place.
- 631 Among retainer-Nayars, the local group might
 692 comprise either one large desam, or a group of
 681 two to four adjacent desams when these were
 occupied by retainer Nayars of the same sub-
 caste. Such an area was called a tara in South
 Malabar and a kara in Cochin, the assembly,
 a tara-koottam or kara-yogam. The assembly
 comprised the headmen of all Nayar property-
 groups who met to settle intra-caste disputes,
 adjudicate in trials of offences against caste law
 and arrange the public ceremonies of their com-
 mon Bhagavadi temple. Offences such as wrong-
 ful interdining with low caste men, small debts,
 thefts and adultery with women of the lower pol-
 luting castes were punished by fines paid to [34]
 the Bhagavadi temple, or in grave cases by ex-
 communication, and sale into slavery. Similarly
 intra-caste offences were settled among desa-
 varis within an assembly of the nad, and among
 nadavaris within an assembly of the kingdom.
 The local Nayar assembly also had power to ar-
 bitrate in disputes and offences against the vil-
 lage at large among the lower castes. Some

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castes seem to have received a military training, although some, especially of the Agattu Charna caste, later became clerks (Dames, 1921: 18-19; A. Gray, 1887, I: 412-413).

The Nayars' traditional arms were the sword, shield, lance, and the bow and arrow, although gunpowder came into increasing use after the Portuguese arrived. Before 1500 battles were highly stylized (cf. C. A. Menon, 1911: 56; Ayyar, 1938: 118, 171). Not more than 10,000 were commonly brought into the field at one time. Severe loss of life was prevented by the employment of Brahman emissaries who, if fighting became intense, might enter the field and arbitrate between the leaders. If, however, the king or a chief were slain, his personal vassals had to fight to the death or until their honor was avenged by the slaughter of a corresponding leader on the enemy side (Logan, 1951, I: 138).

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Later, with the introduction of cannon and fortresses by the Europeans, battles became more frequent and devastating. The Zamorin mustered a total force of between 50,000 and 60,000 at various times in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the ruler of Cochin (Ayyar, 1938: 169, 182). The kings had to rely increasingly on paying their soldiers in cash rather than on sporadic feudal levies. Permanent conquest and the control of rich lands also became a more urgent aim of the kings as the overseas trade expanded. But the Nayar techniques of fighting and their code of honor persisted until British times.

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Within each kingdom, law was administered at several levels. Each local caste group had its own periodic assembly of household heads to judge crimes (which were also sins) against the caste's religious laws. These included wrongful interdining and sexual relations with members of other castes. The chief punishments were fines for the upkeep of the caste shrine and temporary ostracism. Grave offenders were excommunicated with the consent of the chief. They then became the property of either king or chief and were sold as slaves to foreign traders. In the larger castes such as Tiyyars or Pulayas the local caste group was often contained within the village. The smaller castes of village servants each had their own assemblies extending over a group of adjacent villages.

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Among retainer Nayars the local caste group might comprise the Nayars of one caste within one village, within a section of a large village, or within a group of two to four adjacent small villages. This area was called a *tara* in the Calicut kingdom and a *kara* in Cochin; we shall call it a neighborhood. Its assembly was called a *tara-küttam*

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or *kara-yōgam* (Logan, 1951, I: 87-88, 132-133). The functions of intra-caste administration of the Nayar assembly are discussed later in connection with the lineage.

The village headman, assisted by representatives from the Nayar retainers, judged small civil cases concerning debt, petty theft, or trespass. He appropriated the fines in these cases (Munro, quoted in Ayyar, 1938: 288). Individual Nayars also arbitrated in small civil disputes carried voluntarily to them by disputants within their own or the lower castes. Serfs came directly under the jurisdiction of their Nayar or Brahman masters, who had the power of life and death over them.

In the castes above the serfs, larger civil disputes and grave crimes were judged in the court of either chief or king. Chiefs' (*nāduvaris*) judicial powers varied with the size of their armies, but feudatory princes (*svarūpis*) retained complete judicial rights with power over life and death (Ayyar, 1938: 272). So also did the Brahman managers of temple estates, although they called upon some local chief to carry out their judgments. Murder, sacrilege, treason, the wounding of a cow or of a Brahman, indecent assault of a woman, and grave theft from a man of "good" caste were generally punishable by death (*ibid.*: 282). Brahmins and women, however, were never officially executed by order of the king. All offenses among Brahmins were tried by an assembly of the Brahman neighborhood, which, with the local ruler's approval, might excommunicate the offender. If a woman of any caste above serfs was convicted of a capital offense the king had the right to sell her into slavery.

The higher the cast, the wider the field of social relations. Among the serfs and the higher polluting castes this was confined to a group of adjacent villages. Among temple servants, village headmen, and retainer Nayars (apart from their excursions in war) the field of social relations was the chiefdom. Among chiefs and royalty it was the kingdom, and among Brahmins, Kerala.

Hypergamy in the Upper Castes

Each of the castes below Nayar temple menials was endogamous, as is usual in the caste system throughout India. But among the higher "clean" castes the integration of political offices and of the larger territorial units was strengthened by hypergamous marriages. By hypergamy I mean the marriage of a woman of lower caste to a man of higher caste.

In discussing hypergamy it is necessary to explain the descent

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exponents. Marriages at all levels between the religious and secular hierarchies pointed up this interdependence.

Among the Nayars hypergamy must also have cemented lord-vassal relationships. Older Nayars still take pride in the fact that their lineages have for centuries been fathered by chiefs, royals, and Brahmins. Traditionally, it was for the sake of this generalized filial bond that they were prepared to die in battle and, paradoxically, to deny themselves paternal rights in their own children.

Matrilineal Units of the Nayar Retainer Castes

THE CLAN

The clan was the largest matrilineal unit to which a Nayar commoner belonged. Its members believed themselves descended from a common ancestress, but her name was not normally remembered and the exact genealogical relationships between a clan's subordinate segments were often unknown. Occasionally, all of a clan's known members lived within a single Nayar neighborhood (*tara*). In this case the clan was co-terminous with the next lower order of matrilineal unit, which I call the lineage. More commonly, the clan had a nucleus of members within the neighborhood from which it originally sprang, together with outlying segments whose forebears had moved to other neighborhoods of the chiefdom. Clan affiliations among Nayar retainers do not seem to have extended beyond the chiefdom.

The clan was called a *taravād*, the word also used for the lineage and the matrilineal household unit. "Taravād" is derived from "tara," meaning "mound,"* in this case the raised foundation on which a Nayar house was built. Its members derived a sense of unity from the belief that their matrilineal forebears sprang from the same ancestral house, and if the site of this house still existed they retained a sentimental attachment to it. The word "taravād" (befitting for a settled agricultural people) was in fact equivalent to the English "house" in its sense both of ancestry and of place. The clan was usually called by the name of its original ancestral house site.

The clan was exogamous and sex relations within it were forbidden. Those of its members who lived near and met often used kinship terms to address each other. If a death or birth occurred, clan members had to be informed by messenger. Upon receipt of the informa-

* Any kind of raised foundation of earth or laterite is called a tara. Tara (meaning "neighborhood") is derived from the large platform of earth round a sacred "milk-exuding tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) located near the Nayar neighborhood temple of Bhagavadi. The neighborhood assembly congregated on this mound.

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the lineage they were legally mandatory. The local caste assembly, with the backing of royal or chiefly authority, could take action against offenders. Intra-lineage incest was indeed a crime punishable by death. As a matter of courtesy, lineage members extended appropriate kinship terms to one another.

Unless it was declining in numbers and had shrunk to the proportions of a single household, the lineage was not an economic unit. Its members did not jointly own an estate and did not cooperate in the production or distribution of goods. These functions accrued to the small segment of a lineage occupying a single homestead, which I call a property group. Lineage kin were the residual heirs of a property group which died out. However, such reversion of property was rare. A property group which had no childbearing women usually adopted one or more girls from some other branch of the lineage in order to perpetuate itself.

A "commoner" lineage had no headman. Its oldest man commanded special respect but he had no legal authority over the lineage as a whole. The office of headman of the lineage existed only in village headmen's, chiefly, and royal lineages. Here the political office was theoretically vested in the eldest man of the lineage, irrespective of branch. These lineages had a somewhat different structure, discussed below.

The members of a lineage engaged in cooperative activities at two major life crises: the pre-puberty marriage rite of girls, and the funeral of a member, followed by offerings to the departed spirit on the fifteenth and sixteenth days after the death.

Both of these occasions involved the caste assembly of the neighborhood and the institution of linked lineages or *enangar*. The caste assembly comprised the eldest men (*kāranavar*) of all the property groups. It met periodically on a mound (*tara*) near the Bhagavadi temple of the neighborhood to manage the temple's affairs. It also judged offenses against the religious laws of the caste.

Each lineage was linked by hereditary ties of ceremonial cooperation to two or three other lineages of the neighborhood. These linkages were reciprocal but not exclusive. For example, lineage A might have as *enangar* B, C, and D, whereas B might have A, E, and F, and so on. A chain of such relationships therefore linked all lineages of the neighborhood.

The *enangar* were partners who offered help in a ceremonial manner at all major life crises. They stood as formal links between the lineage and the total neighborhood group, which was called the *enangu*. In

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564 formal recognition that the bereaved lineage, freed from its death
765 pollution, had been received back into the normal social life of the
783 caste.

613 Lineage members were also united in worship of their lineage
776 goddess or *dharmadevi* ("goddess of moral law"). This goddess,
794 named differently in different lineages, was a species of the common
Nayar goddess Bhagavadi. Her idol was housed in a small shrine near
the oldest ancestral house or sometimes in the courtyard of the village
temple. She was believed capable of inflicting or withholding sick-
ness and all types of misfortune. To ward them off, members
[782] propitiated her with offerings of cooked food every year. The astrol-
[588] oger might also advise an emergency propitiation. She had the power
[842] to bless women of the lineage with fertility. On this account she was
worshipped before a *tali* rite and also at the first menstruation cere-
monies of a girl. In a somewhat vague sense, moreover, lineage mem-
bers appear to have felt themselves collectively responsible to the
goddess for sins or ritual lapses on the part of one of them. It was be-
lieved that if any member failed to observe the religious laws of
[753] caste, to perform household duties correctly, or to revere the goddess,
[826] she might bring sickness or misfortune upon the lineage as a whole.
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613 In spite of this sense of collective moral responsibility, the evidence
is unclear as to whether the lineage as a whole was held legally
681 responsible for any of its member's acts. It is true that the enangar
564 were the legal representatives of the local caste unit in its relations
with the lineage. This inter-lineage relationship was hereditary and
obligatory. It could not be entered into or permanently broken with-
out the consent of the assembly and the chief of the district. If,
moreover, an individual infringed a religious law of the caste, it was
the duty of his lineage's enangar to summon a caste assembly to judge
[692] and punish the offense. Crimes, which were also sins, against caste
[823] law included incest within the lineage; dining or sex relations with
prohibited lower-caste persons; failure to perform the marriage rite
of a girl before she reached puberty; failure to observe pollution at
the birth or death of a lineage member or (on the part of an in-
dividual woman) during menstruation; failure to pay dues in kind
to the Nayar temple of the neighborhood. On being apprized of an
offense, the assembly's first recourse was temporarily to ostracize the
offender's household from the caste community. Ostracism meant
that the offenders might not enter the temple, bathe in public bathing
pools, enter the houses of other Nayars, employ the village servant

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group supported each other firmly in disputes with other property groups of the lineage, while the men of a lineage were expected to defend each other to the death in outbreaks of violence against other lineages. 593 578

Inter-segmental conflicts between classificatory brothers, or between the men of a sibling group and their mother's classificatory brothers, eventually led to division of the taravād. This could not, however, take place until the men of all generations senior to the disputants were dead. As long as the taravād was obliged to cohere, the formalities associated with age rank between men countered incipient tendencies to segmentary fission. Men were ranked by age irrespective of segment and generation, and the same etiquette of formality and partial avoidance was due an elder own brother as to an elder classificatory brother. Thus the etiquette of age rank not only reduced the dangers of open violence between individual "brothers" of any degree of relationship; it also enforced estrangement and social distance between full brothers, who in some contexts might otherwise have huddled together in unseemly amity to plot against their classificatory brothers in other segments of the property group. 593 561 578

SISTERS

Sisters shared many experiences and interests. They played together in childhood and often experienced the tāli ceremony together. As adults they cooked, swept, pounded paddy, harvested, and cared for babies together. Women were in some respects ranked on the basis of age in the same manner as men. All who were older had some authority over all who were younger. A younger sister was not permitted to receive a visiting husband until after one had appeared to claim her elder sister's or elder classificatory sister's favors. 593 [561]

However, the age ranking and authority structure between women was less formal than that between men. Women had no legal authority over one another. All women of a household were legal minors, collectively under the authority of the men of their household, represented by their karanavan. Women had no place in the caste assembly and might not give evidence in trials. Disputes between women of different households or different lineages were not considered serious matters for public consideration. Women could not legally represent their households in relationships with other households, other castes, or political authorities. 593 562 [592] [564] [623] [578]

For these reasons older women had only moral authority over juniors. They could not enforce their decisions except by appeal 593

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unless he has been admitted by certain formalities to the village to which he has emigrated, is considered to belong to his original home. 621

The village is divided into two *Karas* (or *Ansaams*), the northern *Kara* and the southern *Kara*. The division is arbitrary and has no significance. A man from Kavalam belonging to the North or South *Kara* is treated in another village as belonging to the same place.

The *Bhagavati* (goddess) Temple in the village was, before the government took possession of it, owned by two *Karas* jointly. 621

In each of the *Karas* there are five *Āsāns* or *Pramanis*. They keep *Kalaris* and are honoured and respected by all the *Nāyars* in the district. No common *Nāyar* is allowed to sit in their presence, to enter their kitchen, or to call their women without the title of *Kunjamma* (or *Ladyship*). 622 874 576

The seventy-five families which the *Kara* contains are divided between the five *Āsāns*. Each *Āsān*, therefore, has a general authority over all the families, and special rights over the fifteen families immediately under his control.

In all matters of ceremony the *Āsāns* have to be informed beforehand. Without their presence, no public ceremony of any family is supposed to be valid. All the public functions of the village are done by them. The ceremonies of the temple, for example, are under their control. They are the people who summon the *Karakkars*, or the villagers, to assemble and settle matters of importance. The villagers settle in such assemblies, things relating to the community, such as public festivals, the expenditure of *Karayamam* (common to the village) funds and the behaviour of people who have acted against the customs of the village. If a marriage ceremony had not been properly conducted, it comes before them. If an *Āsān* had not been properly invited, that matter also comes up for consideration. Instances of punishments inflicted by the village on individuals and families were not uncommon till lately. I remember a particular case in which the villagers as a body led by their *Āsān* walked out of the marriage (*Talikettu*) *pandal* because the order of precedence was not kept up. The family of a squire had, during these hard days, become poor, and a rich squire who, in order of precedence, came below him was given a seat of honour. The result was that the whole community walked out as a protest, and the *Kalyanam* had to be held over again to the satisfaction of the poor *Āsān* and his loyal friends. 622 585 626

How strong this organisation is will be seen from the following incident. A gentleman, when coming from Madras, had a Christian friend with him, and his servant who waited for him at Alleppey was eating his food when both of them entered the boat. It is a very rigid custom that no food can be taken in the company, or even in the proximity of any lower caste, and Christians are considered to be such. The result of it was that when they got home the news got abroad that the *Nāyar* servant had eaten with a Christian in the boat, and the whole village 264 564 626

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[114] to grow up. There is one important custom (and Mr. Ananta Krishna Aiyer forgets to notice it)¹ which forbids two generations of girls being married together. When girls become mothers at sixteen, generations mingle frequently and often there may be girls younger than oneself who are one's mother's sisters and, therefore, stand logically in the same position as one's mother. The custom is that they should not undergo the ceremony together, though this is strictly kept up only in richer families.

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[191] The first step to this ceremony is a village and *enangar* council. The prominent people of the village and the *enangers* are invited and the *Kārnawa* takes counsel with them as to the various arrangements with regard to the ceremony. After the *Kaniyan*, or the medicine man (who is also the astrologer and magician), has fixed the auspicious hour for the ceremony, a *pandal*, or a decorated tent, is put up in the presence of the village elders, in the *Muttam*. In the middle of the tent so erected is kept the *Astamangalyam* (Sanskrit word *Asta*=8, *mangalyam*=happiness giving). The *Astamangalyam* consists of a measure of paddy, some rice, an absolutely white cloth (to show purity), an arrow (to show the warlike character), lighted lamp (uninterrupted prosperity), a looking-glass, and a *cheppu* (which is the Malabar equivalent of a powder puff), and a blossom of the coco-nut palm.

[301] The ceremony of *Talikettu* can take place any time of the day, only it must be an auspicious hour. Evening is preferred because more gaiety is possible. Early in the morning the girls are taken to the family tanks by the women of the *Enangar* house, and have an oil bath. After this they are elaborately dressed. They put on various ornaments used only for that day. All the families, of course, do not possess these ornaments; generally, only one or two families in the village have them, but they are available for all on such occasions.

The tier of the *Tali*, who is generally a priest, or sometimes a *Kahatriya* lord, is invited, and he stops at a house near by. The day before the ceremony he goes, accompanied by the village elders on an elephant, in a procession to the nearest temple and gets the *Tali* consecrated by the priest of the temple. In these days I have seen the *Tali*-tier taken in a motor car to the temple, though the slow-moving elephant is more impressive.

[576] At the auspicious hour the bridegroom, in a warrior's dress (with sword, etc.), arrives at the house, accompanied by a party of the villagers. He is welcomed by the male members of the family, and taken to a seat of honour. There the brother (own or collateral) of the girls washes his feet (this is a custom of extreme politeness prevalent among the Hindus). Then the brides are brought into the *pandal*. They make a *pradikshana* (go round the *pandal* by their left three or seven times). The [605] eldest girl's father's sister's son (i.e., her marriageable cousin) gives some brand-new pieces of fine silk cloth, and then the priest or the warrior ties the *Tali* round the girls' necks. This is followed by a huge feast which goes on for four days. On

¹ *Cochin Tribes and Castes*, vol. II, chapter on the Nayars.

rights. Thus did these *küttams* (assemblies) exercise a whole-
some influence, and act as a powerful check upon the rulers
and ministers of the middle ages.¹ They also dealt with wider
questions of castes and other matters affecting the welfare of
the people. In former times there were also minor councils
of *Pramdnis* or leaders of the people in every *Desam* exercising
similar social functions. A survival of this system even now
exists in every village, and their deliberations and decisions
upon social matters and caste disputes have great weight. In
important matters such as the outcasting of a member of the
caste, etc., His Highness the Raja who has always been the
social as well as the political head of the State would deliberate
upon them with the help of the Brahman *vaidiks*, and his deci-
sions become final. The individual who is placed under a ban
is prohibited from entering any temple, bathing in the public
tanks, and is, in short, ostracised.

The Rajas were in former times the fountain of all justice,
but were assisted by *Karyakkars* or ministers
and Brahmins in administering it. All caste
disputes and offences were left to the caste assemblies to deal
with, while civil disputes were either left to the arbitration of
the caste assemblies or of three or four prominent men. There
was no written code, but the punishments assigned by custom
fitted the crimes, and they varied with the status of the caste
and of the person. The nobles enjoyed the privilege of freedom
from confinement. The Brahmins and women were never
put to death; the former were punished for grave offences by
loss of caste and banishment, and the latter by being sold as
slaves. The punishment of death was reserved for such heinous
offences as sacrilege, the wilful murder of a Brahman or a
cow. The following is a summary of the account given by
Duarte Barbosa, pp. 116—117, regarding the methods of dealing
with criminals and the nature of the punishments inflicted on
them in former times:—When any member of a low caste com-
mitted robbery about which a complaint had been made to the
king or the governor, orders were issued for his apprehension, and
if he was caught and he confessed his guilt, he was generally
impaled. His head was severed, and the body being placed
on its back, the arms and legs were fastened with ropes to four
posts, while the multitude to show their contempt spat upon it.
If, however, the malefactor was a Moor, he was beheaded. The

1. Letters from Malabar by J. C. Viischer, pages 76-77.

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[782] day of Makarom (January-February), and on some Tuesdays and Fridays. Kolam-tullal, Velan-pravarti, Ayiramaniyam-tullel, Chavuttu, Tila-homam, and a host of other ceremonies are performed with a view to propitiate spirits, and the assistance of the Kaniyans and Velans is largely sought. Serpents, too, whose images are located on the north-western side of most gardens in Central and North Travancore, receive a large share of adoration. The sun is an object of universal worship. Though the Gayatri cannot be studied, or the Sandhyavandanam of the Brāhmans performed, an offering of water to the sun after a bath, to the accompaniment of some hymn, is made by almost every pious Nāyar. The Panchakshara is learnt from an Ilayatu, and repeated daily. A large portion of the time of an old Nāyar is spent in reading the Rāmāyana, Bhagavata and Mahābharata, rendered into Malayālam by Tunchattu Ezhuttachhan, the greatest poet of the Malabar coast. Many places in Travancore are pointed out as the scene of memorable incidents in the Rāmāyana and Mahābharata. There are many temples, tanks, and mountains connected with Rāma's march to the capital of Rāvana. Equally important are the singular feats said to have been performed by the five Pāndavas during the time of their wanderings in the jungles before the battle of Kurukshetra. Bhima especially has built temples, raised up huge mountains, and performed many other gigantic tasks in the country. There are some village temples owned exclusively by the Nāyars, where all the karakkars (villagers) assemble on special occasions. A very peculiar socio-religious ceremony performed here is the kūttram. This is a village council, held at the beginning of every month for the administration of the communal affairs of the caste, though, at

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the present day, a sumptuous feast at the cost of each villager in rotation, and partaken of by all assembled, and a small offering to the temple, are all that remains to commemorate it. Astrology is believed in, and some of its votaries are spoken of as Trikalagnas, or those who know the past, present, and future. It is due to a curse of Siva on the science of his son, who made bold by its means to predict even the future of his father, that occasional mistakes are said to occur in astrological calculations. Sorcery and witchcraft are believed to be potent powers for evil. To make a person imbecile, to paralyse his limbs, to cause him to lavish all his wealth upon another, to make him deaf and dumb, and, if need be, even to make an end of him, are not supposed to be beyond the powers of the ordinary wizard. Next to wizardry and astrology, palmistry, omens, and the lizard science are generally believed in. In the category of good omens are placed the elephant, a pot full of water, sweetmeats, fruit, fish and flesh, images of gods, kings, a cow with its calf, married women, tied bullocks, gold lamps, ghee, milk, and so on. Under the head of bad omens come the donkey, a broom, buffalo, untied bullock, barber, widow, patient, cat, washerman, etc. The worst of all omens is beyond question to allow a cat to cross one's path. An odd number of Nāyars, and an even number of Brāhmins, are good omens, the reverse being particularly bad. On the Vinayaka-chaturthi day in the month of Avani, no man is permitted to look at the rising moon under penalty of incurring unmerited obloquy.

"The chief religious festival of the Nāyars is Ōnam, which takes place in the last week of August, or first week of September. It is a time of rejoicing and merriment. Father Paulinus, writing in the latter half of the

way of preliminary, a high kick in the air, followed by 526
squatting on the haunches, bounding high, turning,
twisting, pirouetting, and all the time swinging the
sword unceasingly above, below, behind the back, under
the arm or legs, in ever so many impossible ways.
Nāyar shields are made of wood, covered with leather,
usually coloured bright red. Within the boss are some
hard seeds, or metal balls loose in a small space, so that
there is a jingling sound like that of the small bells on
the ankles of the dancer, when the shield is oscillated or
shaken in the hand. The swords are those which were
used ordinarily for fighting. There are also swords of
many patterns for processional and other purposes, more
or less ornamented about the handle, and half way up
the blade."

"The Nāyars," Mr. N. Subramani Aiyar writes, 631
"have a distinct feudal organisation, and the division of
their territories had an unmistakeable reference to it.
The territorial unit was the dēsam, presided over by a
Dāsavazhi. A number of dēsams adjoining one another
constituted a nādu, which was under the jurisdiction of
a chieftain called the Nāduvazhi. Above the Nāduvazhis
was the Rājah, the highest suzerain in the country. In
course of time, each nādu split itself up into a certain
number of taras, over the affairs of which a Karanavan,
or elder, presided. An assembly of these Karanavans [613]
constituted the six hundred—an old socio-military [623] •
organisation of the Nāyars in mediæval times. These 631
six hundred are referred to in two places in the second 175
Syrian Christian document, which bears the date 925 623
A.D. In a South Travancore inscription, dated 371
M.E., the same organisation is referred to as Venat-
tarunuru, or the six hundred of Venad, and one of
their duties evidently related to the supervision of the

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[623] working of temples and charitable institutions connected therewith. As Venad was divided into eighteen districts in ancient days, there might have been altogether eighteen six hundred in the country. The Nāduvazhis possessed considerable authority in all social matters, and possessed enough lands to be cultivated by their Kudiyaṅs. A feudal basis was laid for the whole organisation. Large numbers served as soldiers in times of war, and cultivated their lands when the country was quiet. In modern times, none of them take to military service in Travancore, except those employed as sepoys in the Nāyar Brigade."

[901] Concerning the organisation of the Nāyars, Mr. Logan writes that they were, "until the British occupied the country, the militia of the district (Malabar). This name implies that they were the 'leaders' of the people. Originally they seem to have been organised into six hundreds, and each six hundred seems to have had assigned to it the protection of all the people in a nād or country. The nād was in turn split up into taras, a Dravidian word signifying originally a foundation, the foundation of a house, hence applied collectively to a street, as in Tamil teru, in Telugu teruvu, and in Canarese and Tulu teravu. The tara was the Nāyar territorial unit of organisation for civil purposes, and was governed by representatives of the caste, who were styled Kāranavar or elders. The six hundred was probably composed exclusively of those Karanavar or elders, who were in some parts called Mukhyastans (chief men) or Madhyastans (mediators), or Pramāṅis (chief men), and there seem to have been four families of them to each tara, so that the nād must have originally consisted of one hundred and fifty taras. This tara organisation of the protector caste played a most important

part in the political history of the country, for it was⁶³¹ the great bulwark against the tyranny and oppression of the Rājas. The evidence of the Honourable East India Company's linguist (interpreter, agent) at Calicut, which appears in the diary of the Tellicherry Factory under date 28th May, 1746, deserves to be here reproduced. He wrote as follows: 'These Nāyars, being heads of the Calicut people, resemble the parliament, and do not obey the king's dictates in all things, but chastise his ministers when they do unwarrantable acts.' The parliament referred to must have been the kūttam (assembly) of the nād. The kūttam answered many purposes when combined action on the part of the community was necessary. The Nāyars assembled in^[623] their kūttams whenever hunting, or war, or arbitration, or what not was in hand, and this organisation does not seem to have been confined to Malabar, for the koot organisation of the people of South Canara gave the British officers much trouble in 1832-33. In so far as⁶³¹ Malabar was concerned, the system seems to have⁶⁴³ remained in an efficient state down to the time of the British occupation, and the power of the Rājas was strictly limited. Mr. Murdoch Brown, of Anjarakandi, who knew the country well, thus wrote to Mr. Francis Buchanan in the earliest years of the present (nineteenth) century regarding the despotic action of the Rājas when constituted, after the Mysorean conquest, the revenue agents of the Government of Haidar Ali. 'By this new order of things, these latter (the Rājas) were vested with despotic authority over the other inhabitants, instead of the very limited prerogatives that they had enjoyed by the feudal system, under which they could neither exact revenue from the lands of their vassals, nor exercise any, direct authority in their districts.' And

morning and evening and also in the leisure hours of the noon. I have often noted with interest the way in which even apparently illiterate people discuss among themselves the philosophy of life as preached in the Hindu sastras. 538

Village administration.—Panchayats were only introduced into the State in 1913. His Highness granted it as one of his boons during the celebration of his sixtieth birthday. "It is also my wish to revive, in commemoration of this occasion, the old village panchayat system which, I trust, will give facilities to the people to settle several matters of each village easily and quickly amongst themselves and give them some training in the art of self-government. It may also afford them better opportunities of representing their wants and grievances to the Darbar." With this Proclamation of His Highness the Raja begins the definition of the constitution and powers of the Village Panchayat Regulation. 623

Constitution.—Five members of whom the chief village officer of a revenue village (called locally "Parvathiakaran") is an ex-officio member. The rest are now nominated. It meets at least once a month.

POWERS.

I. *Administrative.*—(1) Maintenance and repairs of all minor irrigation works (i.e., works which do not require professional skill) below the cost of Rs. 500.

- (2) Maintenance of road avenues.
- (3) Maintenance of water-sheds.
- (4) Prevention of epidemic diseases.
- (5) Clearing and repairing of public wells and tanks.
- (6) Formation of Co-operative Credit Societies.
- (7) Improvement of public lanes and canals.

II. *Judicial.*—Civil disputes up to Rs. 50 with or without the consent of the parties, and up to Rs. 200 with the consent of the parties. 692

The judicial portion of the Regulation is still in abeyance and has not been brought into force in any panchayat in the State.

Even the administrative portion is applied only in three places in the taluk, since the rest have not sufficiently responded to the scheme. Watakancheri is still without a panchayat, though it is the headquarters of the taluk. 623

For executive work every taluk is under the direct administrative supervision of a Tahsildar (Revenue officer) who is also the Chief Treasury Officer. Until recently he was also a Magistrate, but this function is definitely taken away from him. Below him are Revenue Inspectors and village officers. The taluk in question, which has 74 villages, has 4 Revenue officers and more than 30 village officers. Watakancheri with an adjoining village is under a "Parvathiakaran" who collects the revenue and who has a clerk under him. This "Parvathiakaran" is paid Rs. 12 per month and his clerk Rs. 9. The revenue inspector supervises the survey work and collection work, and checks the village accounts. There are also a Munsif's Court and a Magistrate's Court in the village for the settlement of civil and criminal disputes. 692

Each taluk in the State has, as a rule, one Sanitary Inspector. The village officers should bring to the notice of the Sanitary 744